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THE EMPTY TOMB

BEING

THOUGHTS ON THE RESURRECTION
OF OUR LORD

BY

B. W. RANDOLPH, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF ELY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

HON. CANON OF ELY

EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN

Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. Alleluia
Qui pro nobis pependit in ligno. Alleluia

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WORLDWIDE DATA
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TO

MY DEAR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE

GERALD WYBERGH DOUGLAS, M.A.

WITH

AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

Sed te potissimum prædicare, propter Resurrectionem gloriosam Filii tui Jesu Christi Domini nostri: Ipse enim verus est Agnus Paschalis, qui pro nobis immolatus abstulit peccata mundi, qui mortem nostram moriendo destruxit, et vitam resurgendo nobis æternam reparavit.

Pref. In Die Paschæ.

PREFACE

THIS little book consists of a paper and a sermon. The paper was read (in substance) at a meeting of the S. T. C.¹ in Cambridge, in November, 1905, and again at a meeting of clergy in the Chapter House of Worcester Cathedral in February of this current year. The sermon was preached at Lincoln Cathedral on Low Sunday, 1903.

The subject of our Lord's Resurrection has been brought prominently forward in recent years by writers who seem to think that if once Christianity can be purged of its miraculous elements, the Church will enter upon a new stage of greater vigour and renewed life. It is, therefore, a duty for those who feel that this is a fatal delusion to speak out plainly.

At the present moment it is the fashion to

¹ Sanctae Trinitatis Confraternitas.

attempt to drive a wedge between the teaching of St. Paul on the subject of our Lord's Resurrection and that of the Evangelists. It is to this attempt that attention is largely directed in the paper which follows. It is historically certain that the Christian Church sprang from and was founded on a belief in the literal Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This belief was not a gradual growth in any sense. It dates from the very morrow of the alleged occurrence. It "sprang suddenly into existence, and it swept irresistibly over the whole body of disciples. Of the force and universality of the belief there can be no doubt."¹

It was the necessary qualification for an Apostle that he should be a "witness of the Resurrection;" every sermon or address of St. Peter and St. Paul culminates in the doctrine of the Resurrection.² It is altogether impossible to imagine that the Christian Church could have risen into being and could have spread throughout the world if the Faith in

¹ Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 178.

² See pp. 44-49.

the Resurrection of our Lord had been eliminated.

It is, then, an historical fact that Christianity was started on the site of an empty tomb, and that "the truth of the Resurrection is something more than that Jesus appeared in vision to this or that disciple." The early Christians believed — as indeed Christians throughout the ages have believed—that Jesus Christ conquered death by rising from the tomb with His Body, glorified indeed and transfigured—operating under new conditions—but the same Body which was born of Mary and was nailed to the Cross.

What, then, is it which we are asked to substitute for this faith?

It is enough, we are told, to believe that the disciples were assured of our Lord's continued life; that though His Body may have mouldered in the tomb, yet He Himself, His Personality, was really alive, and of this the disciples were convinced by the apparitions which they saw or thought they saw of Him after death.

Now, at the outset, it is natural to remark

that this is not what the Evangelists tell us ; they make it quite plain that His *bodily* frame was really present to those who saw Him ; that they saw the sacred wounds in the hands and side, and that they had found the tomb empty, and St. Paul makes it clear that this also was his belief when he says that "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His spirit that dwelleth in you." ¹

There is nothing in the early records to lead us to suppose that if our Lord's Resurrection had not been a real Resurrection—a physical Resurrection as it is now called—that any of the Apostles would have placed any reliance on it, still less that they would have staked everything on proclaiming its truth, or would have given their lives for their Master.

We are indeed reminded that it is more important to believe that Jesus *lives* than that Jesus *rose*, and that if we have Jesus with us in our lives we need not trouble about the literal truth of the Resurrection story.

¹ Rom. viii. 11.

To have Jesus Christ dwelling within us is indeed, in a most true sense, the centre-point of the Christian's life. It is St. Paul who speaks of "Christ in you the hope of glory."¹ But who is this Christ of whom St. Paul speaks thus, and on what is his faith in His indwelling based?

It is a Christ who had conquered death by rising from the tomb on the third day; it is a Christ who had "brought life and immortality to light,"² Who "died for our sins and rose again for our justification;"³ Who was "declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the Resurrection from the dead;"⁴ into whose death he had been baptized,⁵ on whose Body and Blood he fed.⁶

To St. Paul the Christ who was "in him" was the second Adam, the new Head of the human race, the "quickening Spirit,"⁷ Whose uplifted, God-united Humanity had become

¹ Col. i. 17.

² 2 Tim. i. 10.

³ Rom. iv. 24.

⁴ Rom. i. 4.

⁵ Rom. vi. 3.

⁶ 1 Cor. xi. 26, 27.

⁷ 1 Cor. xv. 45.

the Source and well-spring of a new life to all His members. Christ, the Second Adam, was in Him by a real supernatural birth, brought about by the "laver of regeneration,"¹ as the First Adam was in him by natural birth. Every Christian was thus made a "member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones."²

It is the sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ by which we come in contact with, and become partakers of, the Divine Nature. He took human nature up into union with His Godhead, not to destroy any part of it, but to uplift and glorify it and to make it life-giving. It is this glorified God-united humanity on which we feed sacramentally and spiritually in Holy Communion. No part of His Human Nature *saw corruption*; all of it—Body as well as Soul—was uplifted and glorified, being for ever united with His Divine Person.

It will be remembered how St. Cyril of Alexandria argues against Nestorius from the received belief in the Church about the Holy

¹ Titus iii. 5.

² Eph. v. 30.

Communion to a right conception of our Lord's Person.

“For showing forth the death in the flesh of the only-begotten Son of God, that is, of Jesus Christ, and confessing His return to life from the dead, and His assumption into heaven, we celebrate the un-bloody sacrifice in the churches, and thus approach the mystic benedictions and are sanctified, being made partakers of the holy Flesh and precious Blood of Christ, the Saviour of us all, receiving it not as ordinary flesh—God forbid—nor as the flesh of a man sanctified and joined to the Word by a union of dignity, or as having God dwelling in him, but as truly life-giving and the very own Flesh of the Word Himself. For being, as God, life by nature, when He became one with His own flesh He rendered that flesh life-giving.”¹ This language of St. Cyril and

¹ “Καταγγέλλοντες γὰρ τὸν κατὰ σάρκα θάνατον τοῦ Μονογενοῦς Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τουτέστιν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὴν τε ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναβίωσιν, καὶ τὴν εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀνάληψιν ὁμολογοῦντες, τὴν ἀναίμακτον ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις

the language of all the ancient Liturgies, no less than the language of our own Prayer-book,¹ is altogether misleading, if our Lord's Body did not really leave the tomb.

The Body which Christ took of Mary was the Body of the Word made flesh, *i.e.* of God the Son, who took our nature upon Him, not to annihilate any part of it—God forbid—but

τελοῦμεν θυσίαν, πρόσμιέν τε οὕτω ταῖς μυστικαῖς εὐλογίαις καὶ ἁγιαζόμεθα, μέτοχοι γενόμενοι τῆς τε ἁγίας σαρκὸς, καὶ τοῦ τιμίου αἵματος τοῦ πάντων ἡμῶν Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ· καὶ οὐχ ὡς σάρκα κοινὴν δεχόμενοι (μὴ γένοιτο) οὔτε μὴν ὡς ἀνδρὸς ἡγιασμένου καὶ συναφθέντος τῷ Λόγῳ κατὰ τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς ἀξίας, ἡγουν ὡς θεῖαν ἐνοίκησιν ἐσχηκότος, ἀλλ' ὡς ζωοποιὸν ἀληθῶς καὶ ἰδίαν αὐτοῦ τοῦ Λόγου.

“Ζωὴ γὰρ ὢν κατὰ φύσιν ὡς Θεὸς, ἐπειδὴ γέγονεν ἐν πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σάρκα, ζωοποιὸν ἀπέφηνεν αὐτήν.” St. Cyril Alex., *Epistola ad Nestorium Oecumenica*, ii. ch. 7.

¹ See, for example, the *Prayer of Humble Access*, where we pray “that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body.”

to raise the whole of it, body as well as soul, and to make it life-giving.

It is a significant fact, that the denial of the Resurrection in modern theological literature, follows inevitably on a confused and incoherent conception of the Catholic doctrine of the Person of Christ. A well-meant desire to insist on the true Humanity of Christ—(and it may be a wholesome dread of the Monophysite heresy)—has led many into a kind of half-conscious Nestorianism. The Person of Christ, it needs to be clearly stated, is Divine ; He is Perfect God and Perfect Man, yet He is not two but One Christ.

The Incarnation is not to be viewed as an isolated manifestation of an earthly life, however perfect. It was human nature taken into Oneness with God in order that a new type of human life should, by the ministry of the Spirit, be propagated among men. The Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ is conveyed by the power of the Holy Ghost to His members by the Sacraments. The Sacraments which thus spring from the Incarnation and are an extension of it, can only be effectual if the

Resurrection was real, for they are points of contact with our Lord's Human Nature—His Body and His Soul—which is thus life-giving because of its indissoluble union with God.¹

To suppose that, if the Resurrection of Jesus Christ be given up (or explained away), a belief in His Deity and in His abiding Presence in the Church and in the heart and soul of a Christian will nevertheless remain, would seem to be a profoundly hazardous speculation. From the very first the belief that Christ *lives* in the Church was built upon the conviction that He *rose* from the tomb.

What guarantee, what likelihood, is there when the corner-stone of the Resurrection is removed, that the building will remain intact? Are not the probabilities altogether in the other direction? Destroy men's faith in the Resurrection, and you will inevitably destroy their faith in Jesus Christ.

During a discussion a few years ago in the

¹ On this subject see an able article in the *Church Quarterly*, vol. xvi., "Our Lord's Human Example."

vestry of St. Paul's, that dear and revered teacher, Dr. Liddon, interposed with a remark to this effect: "If the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead be not literally and historically true, we may turn the key in the west door of this Cathedral—Christianity is a fiction, is dead."¹

That this is a statement to which St. Paul would have subscribed, together with all the saints and martyrs in every age of the Christian Church, is the assured conviction of the present writer.

B. W. R.

THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE,
ELY,

Feast of St. Gregory the Great, 1906.

¹ I owe this story to the kindness of the Dean of Worcester.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
THE TESTIMONY OF ST. PAUL	I
THE RISEN BODY OF OUR LORD	12
THE TESTIMONY OF THE EVANGELISTS	18
NOTE I—ST. PAUL'S ENUMERATION OF THE WIT- NESSES TO THE RESURRECTION	32
NOTE II—THE TESTIMONY OF ST. JOHN	36
SERMON ON APOSTOLIC PREACHING AND THE RESUR- RECTION	38

THE EMPTY TOMB¹

*If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*² What is this but to say that the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the historic basis of our Faith? And by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ we mean not only that He continues to live in some spiritual mode of existence, but that “a new thing was done; the effect of death was reversed; He lived once more in the body, and this bodily existence was a phenomenal fact.”³

ST. PAUL'S TESTIMONY

It is natural, when speaking of the witnesses to the Resurrection, to begin with the testimony of St. Paul. It is indeed the earliest testimony that we have. The truth of the Resurrection

¹ A Paper read (in substance) before the S. T. C. at Cambridge, November, 1905.

² I Cor. xv. 14.

³ Lacey, *The Historic Christ*, p. 99.

is twice referred to in the earliest Book of the New Testament—the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, written in the year 48 or 49 A.D. In that Epistle, St. Paul writes to his converts as to men who had, as a matter of course, accepted the Resurrection of our Lord. He reminds them how, at his preaching, they had *turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come.*¹ And at the end of the same Epistle, in speaking of a Christian's attitude towards those who had died, he says, *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*²

But we have stronger testimony still in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, written about the year 53. In the great fifteenth chapter of that Epistle, St. Paul is combatting the denial of the resurrection of the body—a denial which had become current among certain members of the Corinthian Church. In so doing, he insists

¹ 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

² 1 Thess. iv. 14.

on the fact of the Resurrection of Christ ; he reminds his converts of what he had preached to them at the first—*ἐν πρώτοις*, at the beginning of his ministry among them—viz. : that *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ; and that He was buried ; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*¹ This, says the Apostle, was the Gospel which he had preached to them, and it was also the Gospel which he had himself received—*I delivered unto you that which I also received*—and this throws St. Paul's testimony back to the time of his own conversion. His conversion took place within two or three years of our Lord's Crucifixion, indeed it may well have been within a year of it.² St. Paul then found the belief in Christ's Resurrection already imbedded in the Christian consciousness. It was part of the Faith taught to a catechumen within a year or two of its alleged occurrence.

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 3.

² So Harnack, who places the Crucifixion in 29 and St. Paul's conversion in 30. See *Die Chronologie*, pp. 238, 239.

He grounds his claim to be an Apostle on the fact that, he had *seen Jesus our Lord*.¹ He claims to be a witness of Christ's Resurrection like those others who had seen Him during the great forty days ; *last of all, as unto one born out of due time, He appeared to me also*.²

The story of his conversion is the most important event in Apostolic history, and it is more fully related than any other outside the Gospels. It is told three times in the Acts—once by St. Luke and twice by the Apostle himself, first before the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, and again before Agrippa at Cæsarea.³ In those accounts there are indeed slight variations in detail, but there is underlying these variations a very substantial unity. “All three narratives really form a perfectly harmonious picture, that Saul beheld an external vision of the Christ in His risen glory ; that it came to him suddenly and from without ;” and that it changed the whole current of his life, so that from being a persecutor and a blasphemer, he became the

¹ 1 Cor. ix. 1.

² 1 Cor. xv. 8.

³ See Acts ix. 1 ; xxii. 4 ; xxvi. 8.

disciple and "slave" of Jesus Christ, and the greatest missionary the world has ever known.

That St. Paul believed he had seen the Risen Christ, that on the strength of that belief he gave up all that life holds dear to the natural man, is indisputable.

But to-day we are told that St. Paul "knew nothing" of the empty tomb, and only believed in a "spiritual" resurrection, that he was in some way assured that the soul of Jesus was still alive. So Harnack differentiates the "Easter faith" the proclamation of a future life, from the "Easter message" of the empty tomb of which St. Paul was perhaps ignorant !

But what does this attempt to drive a wedge between the teaching of St. Paul and that of the Evangelists really come to ?

Let us go back once more to St. Paul's own testimony. When he tells us what he had "received" on his conversion, he mentions not only the death of Jesus Christ but His burial, and after His burial His Resurrection. *I delivered unto you that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins . . . and that He was buried, and that He hath been raised on the third*

day according to the Scriptures. Here the burial and the Resurrection are in closest juxtaposition. The same Person who was buried also rose again. Is it not clear that the Apostle is speaking of a real, what is now called a physical Resurrection? The Body which was buried also rose again; otherwise why mention the burial at all? The "empty tomb," then, is as much an article of faith to St. Paul as to the Evangelists. A Resurrection without the empty tomb would have meant nothing to him. The Body which died on the Cross, was buried in the tomb and rose out of the tomb. His words mean this, or he would never have mentioned the burial at all.

We may reflect upon it in this way: The truth which some of the Corinthians denied was the resurrection of the body.¹ St. Paul

¹ "It is noticeable that although there were doubts in the Apostolic Age on the subject of the Resurrection, it is not as to the Resurrection of Christ, but as to that of Christians. St. Paul argues on the assumption that Christ was really raised as from a premiss common to himself

does not meet this denial by saying that, after all, there was no resurrection of the *body*. He meets it by emphasizing the fact which they had all "received," namely, that our Lord, after having been buried, had risen again, and by pointing out that His Resurrection is a pledge and earnest of our resurrection. He goes on afterwards to answer objections and difficulties, which show still more plainly that the point under discussion was the resurrection of the *body*. "If the dead rise, with what body do they come?" So the question had been framed, and the Apostle answers, *It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.*¹ There is nothing here, surely, to suggest that our Lord's *Body* did not rise. St. Paul implies that our bodies will be changed as His Body was changed Who *became the firstfruits of them that*

and his opponents."—Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 175.

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 43, 44.

sleep. It was the same Body but under different conditions. That this is the meaning of the passage is made more certain by the passage in the Epistle to the Philippians ; when speaking of our Lord's second coming from heaven, he says, *Who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*¹

Further, it cannot be said that the mention of the Burial in the First Epistle to the Corinthians is accidental, for in the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul dwells on the analogy suggested by the bath of Baptism and our Lord's entombment. *Therefore, he says, we are buried with Him by Baptism unto death ; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*² There is nothing, then, in St. Paul's writings to lead us to suppose that he would have called that a Resurrection which was not a Resurrection of the body, or that a

¹ Phil. iii. 21.

² Rom. vi. 4.

Resurrection without the "empty tomb" would have had any meaning for him.

This is made still plainer by St. Paul's sermon at Antioch in Pisidia. We need not stay here to ask whether St. Paul's exact words are quoted; for it will not be questioned that St. Luke's account may be taken to represent the teaching of the Apostle. As he leads up to his doctrine of the Resurrection he says, *As concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He saith on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another Psalm, Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised again saw no corruption.*¹ What does language like this mean but that while David's body mouldered in the tomb, the Body of Jesus Christ was raised out of it?

Since these words were written, an essay by the present Bishop of Ely has appeared, from

¹ Acts xiii. 34-37.

which I venture to make the following extract :
“We note,” he says, “in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians the juxtaposition of the Burial and the Resurrection—the latter is the reversal of the former ; the mention of ‘the third day ;’ the assertion is not that He ‘was seen on the third day,’ but that He ‘hath been raised on the third day ;’ and lastly the inference as to the future resurrection of the bodies of men which the Apostle draws from the resurrection of the Body of Christ. To recognize and give due weight to the significance of St. Paul’s words and arguments is to be convinced that he believed that on the third day the Lord’s Body was raised from the grave ; that he believed that the grave was found empty as well as that the Lord Himself was seen by His disciples.”¹

It must not be forgotten that St. Paul mentions in the First Epistle to the Corinthians that our Lord appeared to five hundred brethren at once, of whom he says the greater part *remain unto this present* (i.e. the year 53), *but some are*

¹ *Cambridge Theological Essays*, p. 391.

fallen asleep. Would the Apostle make a statement of this kind unless he had known it to be true? Intercourse between Corinth and the East was quite common at the time ; it would have been easy for his readers to verify his statements.

But further, it is important to notice that St. Paul mentions two especially by name of those who had seen the Risen Lord, viz. Peter and James. Now, why is this ? The explanation is to be found in the Epistle to the Galatians, written, it is thought, shortly before the first Epistle to the Corinthians. In the Epistle to the Galatians the Apostle tells his readers that three years after his conversion he went up to Jerusalem, stayed there a fortnight, and saw Peter and James,¹ and that he saw none of the other Apostles. Now, this first visit to Jerusalem occurred three years after St. Paul's conversion, or from four to seven years after our Lord's Crucifixion. Is it conceivable that St. Paul did not ask Peter and James about the Resurrection ? Surely it is morally certain that he did so. St. Paul's testimony, therefore,

¹ Gal. i. 18, 19.

comes to us as the authority of contemporary and living witnesses. We may feel certain that St. Paul verified at Jerusalem that which he had "received" on his conversion from the Christians in Damascus, and that he heard from the lips of Peter and James that Christ had been buried and had risen again on the third day, and how St. Peter had visited the empty tomb, and how they themselves had both seen the Risen Lord.

THE RISEN BODY OF CHRIST

But further, we are told to-day¹ that St. Paul's conception of our Lord's Resurrection-Body differs from that which meets us in the Gospels. "St. Paul," we are told, "held and taught a view of the spiritual body which is not at all easy to reconcile with those statements of the Gospels and Acts which speak of the Risen Christ as having flesh and bones,² as being touched by His Apostles,³ as eating and drinking

¹ See F. H. Woods in the *Guardian*, May 3, 1905.

² St. Luke xxiv. 39.

³ St. Matt. xxviii. 9 ; St. John xxi. 27.

with them.”¹ But where is the discrepancy? St. Paul nowhere hints that our Lord’s Resurrection-Body was not a real body. It had been “changed,” he implies, just as our own bodies will be changed, but it had not ceased to be a real body. That phrase of his, “a spiritual body,” must not be evaporated into meaning no body at all. His own testimony that he had seen the Risen Christ implies that he had seen Christ in His human yet glorified Body. What would have been the point of St. Paul’s argument in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia when he contrasts David’s body which had “seen corruption” with Christ’s Body which “saw no corruption,” if he had meant that Christ had not really risen with His Body at all?² And do not the Gospels bear witness

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 42, 43.

² “It was sown a natural body, that is, a body governed by ordinary natural laws; and raised a spiritual body, that is, a body which, while retaining physical substance and unimpaired identity, was yet endowed and interpenetrated with some of the properties of Spirit. . . . And

to the same truth—that the Body of the Risen Christ was a real Body, the same Body yet not the same, the same yet changed, the same but with new properties added, the same body yet a spiritual body? It could appear and disappear, it could pass through closed doors, it could become unrecognizable at will: certainly it was changed, yet it was the same Body. He was not a “ghost”—*Behold My hands and My*

if it be asked, how could a solid and palpable Body, which men could handle, which could eat and converse, thus vanish and reappear, it is better at once to say that we do not know. Only, our ignorance of the explanation of such a matter as this by no means proves that no explanation could be given, still less that the supposition of a physical body traversed by spiritual properties is an impossible supposition. . . . Undoubtedly our Lord's risen Body had properties which belong to spirit; but they did not suspend or impair its reality as a body; as the Body which had been born of Mary, and had been nailed to the Cross.”—Liddon's *Easter Sermons*, vol. i. pp. 108, 109.

*feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have.*¹ It still bore the marks of the Passion. *He showed unto them His hands and His side.*²

The disciples are taught in all this two lessons—the reality of the Resurrection-Body and its spirituality. Is not this exactly analogous to St. Paul's statement about our bodies after the resurrection? *It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.*³ The body of our humiliation will be fashioned like unto His glorious Body.⁴ Both in St. Paul and in the Evangelists the teaching is the same. "The bodily structure remains; it is in a most real sense the same Body bearing the sacred scars of the Passion, yet its presence and appearance are governed by laws which are entirely different from those which govern the 'natural' body. It is no longer a natural body, it is spiritual."

True, St. Paul says *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven*;⁵ but in the passage

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 39. ² St. John xx. 20.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 44. ⁴ See Phil. iii. 21.

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 7.

in St. Luke's Gospel where our Lord is describing His own Risen Body, He does not use the familiar phrase "flesh and blood," but He employs the remarkable phrase "flesh and bones"—*a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have.*¹ It is surely not too much to say that this remarkable phrase must have been designedly chosen to convey a different idea from the ordinary term "flesh and blood." "Flesh and blood" would clearly seem to denote man's nature under its present natural conditions, as when St. Paul says, *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven*, or as in that passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews where the writer, speaking of the Incarnation of our Lord, says, *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same.*²

"Stress is laid here," says Bishop Westcott,³ "on that element which is the symbol of life as subject to corruption." "Flesh and blood," says Dr. Gibson, "is a term with earthly

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 39.

² Heb. ii. 14.

³ *Comment., in loc.*

associations connected with it, suggestive rather of the lower animal life than of the higher spiritual existence.”¹

“Flesh and bones,” on the other hand, is “altogether a nobler expression.” It denotes “kinship and close personal union and relationship,” and by using such a phrase our Lord would have meant to convey (1) that He was not a “ghost” as they supposed—a merely disembodied spirit; nor (2) was He, on the other hand, exactly in the same state as He had been before His death—He was not “flesh and blood.” But (3) He was really one with His disciples, sharing their human nature indeed, though now in a glorified condition. “To have said that He was ‘flesh and blood,’ would have misled them into the idea that He was exactly what He had been: He therefore says that He has ‘flesh and bones’ in proof that while He had undergone a change, that change still left Him truly human.”

¹ See for this and for what follows, Gibson's *Articles*, Art. iv., and Milligan on the *Resurrection*, p. 242.

There is then no difference, as it seems to the present writer, between St. Paul's conception of our Lord's Resurrection-Body and the accounts which we read in the Gospels. As in the case of the "empty tomb," so in the case of the Body of the Risen Lord—St. Paul is in harmony with the Evangelical narratives.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE EVANGELISTS

When we leave St. Paul and turn to consider the evidence of the Gospels for the truth of the Resurrection, we are met with the difficulties presented by certain discrepancies in the narratives.

The main point to which attention is nowadays directed is the locality of the appearances of the Risen Lord. Where did they occur? St. Matthew and St. Mark speak of appearances in Galilee, while St. Luke mentions appearances only in or near Jerusalem. Hence it is sometimes asserted that the appearances in Jerusalem are an addition to the earliest form of the Resurrection story which speaks only of appearances in Galilee; or at least it is contended that both series of appearances cannot

be true, and that we must consequently make our choice between the two. But why? What are the facts?

St. Matthew records the words of the angel to the women—*Go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and behold He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.*¹ Observe here that this Evangelist implies that the disciples were still in Jerusalem; they had not fled into Galilee; and further notice that St. Matthew distinctly records that our Lord's first appearance was in Jerusalem, for he tells us that as the women departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy to tell His disciples, *Behold Jesus met them, saying, All hail, and they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.* The first Evangelist does thus record one Judæan appearance, and he makes it plain that the disciples were still in Jerusalem on Easter Day, thus clearly leaving room for other appearances in Judæa such as those which St. Luke reports.

Next, as to St. Mark's Gospel, we cannot

¹ St. Matt. xxviii. 7.

build up any theory on this, for we do not know how this record originally ended.¹ It breaks off abruptly with the message sent from the sepulchre through the women, *Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you.* The original Gospel of St. Mark may have ended—it seems indeed most probable that it did end—with a series of Galilean appearances such as those recorded by St. Matthew, but we cannot be sure. In any case it does not go one step towards proving that there were no manifestations in Judæa ; on the contrary, this Gospel rather proves that “the oldest tradition included the assertion that the Apostles were still waiting in Jerusalem on Easter Day.”²

But, further, what is the evidence of the last twelve verses of St. Mark's Gospel as it has come down to us ? We cannot brush away

¹ The last twelve verses are, by nearly all scholars, not regarded as part of the original Gospel of St. Mark.

² Sparrow Simpson, *The Resurrection*, p. 59.

these verses as of no value because they did not form part of the original St. Mark.

This fragment "must have been of very early date," says Dr. Salmond, "and it is not the kind of addition that can be readily explained in a work of mere invention. It embodies a true Apostolic tradition, and may have been written by some companion or successor of the original author."¹

Dr. Swete regards it as "a genuine relic of the first generation," which, being received by the Churches of Rome and Gaul, "took its place unchallenged in the fourfold Gospel of the West."²

Dr. Salmon says, "We must ascribe the authorship (of these last twelve verses) to one who lived in the very first age of the Church."³

What, then, do these twelve verses tell us? They contain a summary of our Lord's appearances, not in Galilee, but in Judæa; there is a reference to the journey to Emmaus, the appearance to Mary Magdalene, and an

¹ Hasting's *Dict. of the Bible*, vol. iii. p. 253.

² *Commentary on St. Mark*, p. cxiii.

³ *Introduction to the N.T.*, p. 151.

appearance to the eleven Apostles as they sat at meat.¹

St. Luke's Gospel also tells us entirely of appearances in Judæa, the only mention of Galilee being a reference made by the angels to a prediction of our Lord *while He was yet in Galilee.*²

But St. John's Gospel unites the two traditions. It contains first of all an account of appearances

¹ That this account of the post-Resurrection appearances in the last twelve verses of St. Mark are not a mere summary of the account in St. Luke and St. John, but has an independent value, seems clear from a comparison of St. Luke xxiv. 33, 34 with St. Mark xvi. 12, 13. In the one account the two disciples returning from Emmaus to Jerusalem find "the Eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." In the other (St. Mark's account), the two disciples on their return from Emmaus "went and told it unto the residue ; neither believed they them."

² St. Luke xxiv. 6.

in Judæa, and then it speaks of an appearance in Galilee to seven disciples by the Lake. In the first series St. John tells us of the appearance to Mary Magdalene, the appearance to the ten Apostles on Easter Day, and that to the eleven Apostles a week later. The twenty-first chapter, which contains the appearance on the Lake of Gennesaret, was probably added a little later, for the express purpose, as it seems, of correcting a mistake which had arisen about St. John himself—*that that disciple should not die*. There is nothing whatever to suggest that it was added to “harmonize the other Gospels.” Had the writer intended this he would have narrated the same appearance in Galilee as St. Matthew records, not an entirely different one, nor would he, as Mr. Sparrow Simpson points out, “have brought his Gospel to an apparent close immediately after a description of our Lord’s appearances in Judæa.” This would not have been the method of a harmonizer.

What, then, is to be said about these two series of appearances recorded in the Gospels? Are they two traditions which are irreconcilable

with one another? Is it true that the Galilean tradition is the original one, and the Judæan a later one?

There is, I believe, no solid reason for thinking so. There is no evidence to show that the Apostles were not still at Jerusalem on Easter Day. On the contrary, it is quite clear that they had not fled into Galilee. St. Matthew and St. Mark both make it plain that this was part of the oldest tradition, and if they were still at Jerusalem they would naturally have remained there till after the Paschal Feast. Consequently it is natural also that our Lord should have appeared to them there, as well as later on in Galilee. St. Matthew indeed, as we have seen, though he is mainly concerned with Galilean appearances, yet tells us that our Lord appeared near the sepulchre to the Holy Women. Surely we can trust St. Luke in this matter. He had carefully traced out everything from the very beginning—his accuracy has of late years been put to a severe test, and has not been found wanting—and he mentions in detail several appearances in Judæa.

It is true that if we had his Gospel alone to

guide us we should find some difficulty in fitting in a series of Galilean appearances, for the Ascension seems to follow on immediately after our Lord's appearance to the eleven Apostles on Easter Day ; but we have St. Luke's second volume—the Acts of the Apostles—and we are therefore certain that there is a gap between verses 49 and 50 of chapter xxiv. of his Gospel ; for he tells us in the Acts that our Lord *showed Himself alive after His passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God.*¹ Forty days give sufficient time for the appearances in Galilee, so that we need not regard this question as of serious importance.

Difficulties in detail may remain—they do remain—as to the exact sequence of events, as to how the different accounts are to be fitted into one another ; but we may safely say with M. de Pressensé, “men have exaggerated beyond all bounds the divergences in the Evangelical narratives. We do not deny these divergences, . . . but estimated at their real

¹ Acts i. 3.

worth, they never reach the height of an insoluble contradiction.”¹

For, after making all due allowance for discrepancies, surely the main question is, on what points do the Evangelists agree?

All the writers agree in saying that on the third day the tomb was found empty.²

This story of the empty tomb seems to have been acknowledged by the enemies of the disciples as well as by the disciples themselves.

¹ *Jesus Christ, Son temps*, p. 659 (quoted in Sparrow Simpson's *Our Lord's Resurrection*).

² “The ‘third day’ is hardly less firmly rooted in the tradition of the Church than the Resurrection itself. We have it not only in the speech ascribed to St. Peter (Acts x. 40), but in the central testimony of St. Paul, and then in the oldest form of the Apostles’ Creed. It is strange that so slight a detail should have been preserved at all, and still stranger that it should hold the place it does in the standard of the Church’s faith. We must needs regard it as original.”—Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 183.

The tomb was empty : where was the Body ? The story that it had been secretly removed by the disciples was circulated by hostile Jews, and was current, as we know, when St. Matthew's Gospel was written. It is mentioned by Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho*.¹ This all points to the truth of the story of the empty tomb. If the tomb had not been found empty, why was such a story put in circulation ? It does not depend at all exclusively on Christian testimony, and "the Jewish story of the stolen Body, taken for what it is worth, shows that

¹ § 108. "Not only did you not repent when you learnt that He had risen from the dead, but, as I said, you commissioned chosen men, and sent them throughout the whole world to declare that 'an atheistical and lawless heresy has been raised by one Jesus, a deceiver from Galilee, whom we crucified, but His disciples stole Him by night from the tomb in which He was laid, when unnailed from the Cross, and now deceive mankind, saying that He has risen from the dead, and gone up into heaven.'"

among the enemies of Christianity also there was a record that could not be denied of the grave found open and empty, of the body mysteriously gone.”¹

It is surely worth while in this connexion to remind ourselves of St. Peter’s speech on the Day of Pentecost. It was in Jerusalem. It was only seven weeks after the alleged event. He insists on the Resurrection of Christ ; he quotes the sixteenth Psalm—“*Thou shalt not leave My soul in hell,*”—and he explains the words as referring, not to David, but to David’s greater Son—that His soul was not left in hell, neither did His flesh see corruption. This was only fifty days after the alleged event ; and it was in the very heart of Jerusalem itself. “Any one might have refuted the Apostle if he were not speaking the truth. They were on the spot. They could visit the tomb. They could collect and investigate the current stories. They could discuss matters with the Jews. They could

¹ Lacey, *The Historic Christ*, p. 109. See p. 35, “On Jewish Testimony to the Resurrection.”

compare, balance, analyze conflicting opinion. . . . They had unrivalled opportunities for satisfying themselves of its being a reality or a fiction. Yet, at the risk of comfort, position, life, they professed their belief in its truth.”¹ Three thousand souls were added to the Lord.

The fact, then, of the empty tomb once established, it is of very little moment, comparatively speaking, that there are difficulties as to the precise order of the appearances of the Risen Christ, on and after the day of the Resurrection, or that one Evangelist tells us only or mainly of appearances in Galilee, and another speaks only of those in Judæa. Would it not rather be surprising if their stories agreed in every detail? Might we not, if that were the case, suspect collusion? Do not the discrepancies in detail rather go to prove the truth of the central fact on which all are agreed—the empty tomb, the Risen Lord, the third day? “Divergence in detail, when it does not involve contradiction in essentials, is *pro tanto*

¹ Liddon, *Easter Sermons*, vol. i. p. 73.

a pledge of truth.”¹ If a number of witnesses disagree or even contradict one another (though the Gospel witnesses do not do that) while agreeing on the main issue, their evidence is of value.²

Our subject has been the evidence of St. Paul and the Evangelists to the truth of the Resurrection and the “empty tomb”—or, rather, the consideration of certain salient features of that evidence. It must not, however, be supposed that I have forgotten that the most important evidence for the Resurrection is the “permanence and vitality” of the Christian Church. The Church is based, historic Christianity is based, on the literal truth of our Lord’s Resurrection from the tomb, and though one

¹ *Cambridge Theological Essays*, p. 395.

² “No difficulty of weaving the separate incidents into a well-compacted narrative can impugn the unanimous belief of the Church which lies behind them, that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day, and appeared to the disciples.”—Sanday, *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 180.

cannot expand the argument here suggested, I may bring our subject to a close by quoting from an essay of Dr. Chase which has already been referred to.

“Historical criticism must take account, not only of the Resurrection, but of its sequel. The Resurrection is the one explanation of the Christian Church. On the basis of a belief in the Resurrection, the Christian society arose and has lived, at times seeming to sin against its first principles, yet surviving ; again and again in the hour of its apparent decrepitude renewing its youth, proving itself a moral power, able to regenerate men of every type, of every race, of every age. The Resurrection cannot be separated from the effects which have flowed from it through all the Christian centuries.”¹

¹ *Cambridge Theological Essays*, p. 401.

NOTE I

ST. PAUL'S ENUMERATION OF THE WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION

ST. PAUL states that our Lord appeared to (1) Peter, then to (2) the Twelve, after that to (3) above five hundred brethren at once ; after that to (4) James, then to (5) "all the Apostles." This is part of the tradition that he had received at his conversion in 31, which he had delivered to the Corinthian Christians some fifteen or twenty years later.

This enumeration does not pretend to be exhaustive. Peter and James were not only, when he wrote his Epistle, the most important and commanding figures in the Church, but they were also the two Apostles with whom he had spoken during his visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion.

The appearance to the "Twelve" can be

identified either with the appearance of the Ten in the upper chamber on the evening of the Resurrection, or to the Eleven (when Thomas was with them) a week later. The number—twelve—in either case cannot be pressed: it obviously means the Apostles. Then there is the appearance to the Five hundred brethren at once. This may be, as some have thought, identical with the appearance recorded in St. Matt. xxviii. 16; but in any case it must refer to an appearance in Galilee, for there only could there have been many believers. St. Paul, therefore, no less than St. John, combines the two traditions of appearances in Galilee as well as in Jerusalem.

When, lastly, St. Paul adds that our Lord appeared to "all the Apostles," it would seem that the word "Apostle" is here, as elsewhere in St. Paul, used in its widest sense, for he distinguishes between "the Twelve" and "all the Apostles." This appearance is mentioned last, and can, therefore, with some show of probability, be identified with the appearance which took place just before the Ascension. If the Gospel accounts of this appearance

suggest that none but the Eleven were present, the account in the Acts leaves room for others, for it speaks of those which had companied with the Eleven from the beginning "till the day that He was taken up."¹

It is important to notice that St. Paul, in the passage in 1 Corinthians, is referring to a "received" statement current in the Church about the appearances of Christ. He mentions the Twelve—Peter—James—all the Apostles—five hundred brethren. It will be seen that there are representative individuals or groups. "It is a statement of testimony which in any other field of history would be regarded as of extraordinary weight, whether we have regard to its official character, its numerical strength, or the status of the persons who offered it."² And if it be asked why there is no mention in this summary of the three other recorded

¹ Acts i. 22.

² See, for this quotation and for the tenor of the whole note, "Evidence for the Resurrection of Christ," *Church Quarterly Review*, January, 1906.

appearances of the Risen Christ—that to Mary Magdalene, to the travellers to Emmaus, and to the Seven on the Lake—it is enough to say that these appearances were all of a more private significance, and consequently would not naturally be found in an official summary, given as his conversion, such as St. Paul seems to be, at least in part, alluding to.

JEWISH TESTIMONY TO THE RESURRECTION.

Mr. Lacey's statement¹ that there are references in Rabbinic literature to the supposed stealing of the body of Jesus, cannot (so far as I can find) be substantiated. A hostile reference, however, to the Resurrection appears to occur in *Talmud of Babylon, Sandh*: 106a. See *Jesus Christ in the Talmud*, p. 61, Dalman, Eng. trans. by Dr. Streane.

¹ *The Historic Christ*, p. 108.

NOTE II

THE TESTIMONY OF ST. JOHN

No reference has been made in the text to the special evidence for the Resurrection arising from St. John xx. Dr. Latham has, in *The Risen Master*, worked out this point thoroughly. It will be enough here to summarize it briefly.¹

When St. Peter and St. John reached the sepulchre on Easter morning, St. John noticed the linen cloths lying flat, and the napkin that was about His head not lying with the linen cloths, but "wrapped together in a place by itself;" or, rather, *gathered together in a knot in one place by itself*. "This suggests that when our Lord assumed His body the cloths weighted with the spices fell flat on the ground, but the

¹ This summary is taken mainly from Rev. C. Bickersteth's *Letters to Godson*, pp. 98, 99.

napkin, that probably had been tied in a knot under the chin, would still retain the shape of the sacred head. It was this that carried conviction to the mind of St. John." *He saw and believed.*¹ Had the body been carried off by human hands, the cloths would either have been taken away or flung aside.

¹ St. John xx. 8.

APOSTOLIC PREACHING AND THE RESURRECTION ¹

If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain (1 Cor. xv. 14).

This sounds a stern saying at first sight. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." St. Paul is saying that we must not trifle with truth.

There were some amongst the Corinthian converts who were denying the Resurrection: they seem to have denied the Resurrection, not of Christ, but of Christians, and yet to have thought that they could remain believers, and St. Paul saw there was need of plain speaking; it was not a case for half-measures. Such persons must clearly understand the serious nature of such a denial—let them apprehend

¹ Preached in Lincoln Cathedral on Low Sunday, 1903.

what the position they were taking up really involved. It was nothing less than this, that they were in reality no Christians at all. To deny the resurrection of Christians was to deny that Christ was risen ; and to deny that Christ was risen was to deny Christ. This is what St. Paul really means when he speaks in those words which, though they sound so stern, are really so charitable, because they are so true : " If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

I trust I am not speaking to-night to any who deny or question the Resurrection ; but it is well for us—in a sense it is our duty—at Easter-tide to reflect again and again on the supreme importance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I

Bear with me, then, if I ask you to consider again, on this octave of Easter Day, that the Resurrection is, as the late Bishop (Westcott) of Durham said, not only an article of the Creed, like " I believe in God," but also one of

the best-attested facts of history. And we may, I think, say with reverence that our Blessed Lord took care that it should be so. Several times in the course of His ministry He said that He would rise again. Sometimes under a figure, when at the beginning of His ministry He said, *Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will build it up.*¹ Or, at the end of His ministry, when He speaks of laying down His life that He might take it again.² Or, when He refers to Jonah in the whale's belly being a sign of His own burial.³

Or, sometimes when, leaving metaphor, He speaks more plainly and in detail about His sufferings, He speaks no less plainly about His Resurrection.

It was so at Cæsarea Philippi, when St. Peter had confessed Him as the Christ.⁴

It was so after His Transfiguration, as He came down from the mountain. *And as*

¹ St. John ii. 19.

² St. John x. 18.

³ St. Matt. xii. 39.

⁴ St. Matt. xvi. 21; St. Mark viii. 31; St. Luke ix. 22.

they came down from the mountain, Jesus chargea them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.¹

It was so on His last journey to Jerusalem. Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death. . . . And the third day He shall rise again.²

It was so after the Last Supper, on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, when He said, After that I am risen again I will go before you into Galilee.³

And as He had spoken so it came to pass, for on the very day of His Resurrection He appeared no less than five times.⁴

(1) To Mary Magdalene alone in the garden.

(2) To Mary Magdalene and the other

¹ St. Matt. xvii. 9 ; St. Mark ix. 9.

² St. Matt. xx. 17 ; St. Mark x. 32-34 ; St. Luké xviii. 31-33.

³ St. Matt. xxvi. 32.

⁴ St. John xx. 11-18 ; St. Mark xvi. 9-11.

Mary and Salome, when they held Him by the feet and worshipped Him.¹

(3) To St. Peter alone.²

(4) To the two disciples in their walk to Emmaus.³

(5) And in the evening, when the doors were shut and all the disciples, except St. Thomas, were gathered together, and *when He showed them His hands and His side.*⁴

After this first Easter Day at least five appearances are recorded, and these, it is implied, were not all that took place.

(1) Seven days after the first Easter Day—to-day, as it were—He appeared again to the Apostles, and convinced Thomas.⁵

(2) At another time He appeared to seven

¹ St. Matt. xxviii. 1-10; St. Mark xvi. 1-8; St. Luke xxiv. 1-11.

² St. Luke xxiv. 34; 1 Cor. xv. 5.

³ St. Mark xvi. 12, 13; St. Luke xxiv. 13-35.

⁴ St. Mark xvi. 14-18; St. Luke xxiv. 36-49; St. John xx. 19-23; 1 Cor. xv. 5.

⁵ St. John xx. 26-29.

of the disciples—four of whom were Apostles—on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, when He reinstated St. Peter in his Apostolic office.¹

(3) On another occasion He appeared to His relative, St. James-the-Less.² On another He appeared to more than five hundred brethren, more than half of whom were alive when St. Paul wrote the Corinthian Epistles, twenty-five years later.³

(4) Lastly, He was seen of all the Apostles at Jerusalem, when He led them out as far as to Bethany, and gave them His last charge and benediction, and went up into heaven before their eyes; while at the same time He promised them that He would be with His people always, even to the end of the world.⁴

Such is the record of the fact.

¹ St. John xxi. 1-23.

² I Cor. xv. 7.

³ I Cor. xv. 6; St. Matt. xxviii. 16.

⁴ St. Mark xvi. 19; St. Luke xxiv. 50-52; Acts i. 3-8; St. Matt. xxviii. 19.

II

But this is not all. If you will let your mind pass on to the Acts of the Apostles, you will find that the early Christians showed their sense of the importance of the Resurrection by making it the special theme of all their preaching. Let me recall some of the examples of this.

When another Apostle had to be chosen in the place of Judas, it was essential, St. Peter says, that he should be a witness with them of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹

When St. Peter preached to the multitudes on the Day of Pentecost, what he specially insists upon is the Resurrection. He quotes, you may remember, the sixteenth Psalm, *Thou shalt not leave My soul in hell*. And he explains that the words do not refer to David, but to David's greater Son. That David, being a prophet, spake of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that *His* soul was not left in hell, neither did *His* flesh see corruption.

¹ Acts i. 22.

This, remember, was only fifty days after the Resurrection, and it was in the very heart of Jerusalem itself.¹

“They were on the spot. They could visit the Tomb. They could collect and investigate the current stories. They could discuss matters with the Jews. They could compare, balance, analyze conflicting opinion. . . . They had unrivalled opportunities for satisfying themselves of its being a reality or a fiction. Yet, at the risk of comfort, position, nay life, they publicly professed their belief in its truth.”² They could not be Christians without making this profession. And they made it.

Anybody might have refuted the Apostle, if he were not speaking the truth; but, instead of any refutation, they were pricked to the heart. Three thousand souls were added to the Church.

Again, when Peter and John had healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the

¹ Acts ii. 30–33.

² Liddon's *Easter Sermons*, vol. i. p. 73.

Temple, and St. Peter was addressing the people, the fact he dwells most of all upon is the Resurrection. Listen, *Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so steadfastly on us, as though by our own powers or holiness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham hath glorified His Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and ye killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses.*¹

That was to the people who came crowding round him in the street. But, observe, it was the same when he had formally to defend himself before the Jewish council. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is his theme and his justification.

Filled with the Holy Ghost, set in their midst he says—

Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we be examined concerning the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole—be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of

¹ Acts iii. 14, 15.

*Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.*¹

And a little later when St. Luke (who wrote the Acts) wants to sum up the main theme of Apostolic preaching, he says : *With great power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*²

And again, when St. Peter preaches to the heathen Cornelius and his household,³ the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the climax of his address.

You will remember that the last part of the Acts of the Apostles is taken up with the life and preaching of St. Paul—as the first half is largely with the preaching of St. Peter. Well, if you turn to the later chapters, you will see that St. Paul preached the Resurrection no less than St. Peter.

At Antioch in Pisidia, he contrasts David who fell asleep and saw corruption with Jesus Christ whom God raised up, and who saw no

¹ Acts iv. 7, *sqq.* ² Acts iv. 33.

³ Acts x. 40.

corruption.¹ That was to his own countrymen the Jews in the synagogue. But it is the same at Athens among the Gentiles. When St. Paul preached at Athens he so emphasized the Resurrection that he seemed to some to be a setter forth of two new Gods—Jesus and the Resurrection. When he spoke in Areopagus—which would correspond to a Town Hall in one of our own cities—he plainly tells his audience that *God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, whereof, he adds, He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead.*²

Some years later, before the Jewish council, it is the same: *Of the hope and Resurrection of the dead I am called in question.*³

Two years later the same Paul is defending himself before King Agrippa; listen how he sums up his defence. *I continue unto this day, by God's help, witnessing both to small*

¹ Acts xiii. 36, 37.

² Acts xvii. 31.

³ Acts xxiii. 6.

*and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead.*¹

You will see, my brethren, that from the beginning to the end of the Acts of the Apostles, which contains the early history of the Church, the paramount subject of Apostolic preaching was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Take away *that*, and what is there in their preaching which it would be worth while to leave ?

It would be like taking out the keystone from an arch—everything would fall to pieces ! Take away the Resurrection, and the preaching of the Apostles contains no new message of which we can be really well assured.

Observe, it does not matter whether they were speaking to their own countrymen or to strangers—to Jews or Gentiles, to the educated or the uneducated, in the streets, or in private houses, in the courts of law or in the

¹ Acts xxvi. 23.

synagogues—everywhere and in every case the theme is the same. It is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the paramount theme of their preaching.

If this be so, it is no wonder, then, that St. Paul takes the same line, so to say, in this Epistle to the Corinthians: with those also who were denying or questioning the truth of the Resurrection. To deny that, he says, is to deny all that I have taught you. *If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*

III

And now let us come a little nearer home, and ask why is it that the truth of the Resurrection is of such a momentous importance to us Christians of to-day, no less than to those of the first century?

How do we know that what Jesus Christ has told us about ourselves, about Himself, about God, about the world to come, is true if all ended with Calvary, if His Body mouldered in the grave?

If the catastrophe of Good Friday was indeed the end, then we have no guarantee at all that anything He said about Himself or about these things was true. But the Resurrection was the vindication — complete and absolute — of His claims and of the truth of all that He said. Reflect upon it well, my brethren. If the Resurrection did not happen, how can we say that Christ *died for our sins*?¹ How can the blood of a man whose body decayed in the tomb cleanse us from our sins?²

How could the blood of a mere man (for in that case He is nothing more) *cleanse us from all sin*? How can such an one say, *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*?³ How can He say, *Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out*?⁴ How could He say to Caiaphas, *Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God*?⁵ How could He say,

¹ Rom. v. 8.² 1 St. John i. 7.³ St. Matt. xi. 28.⁴ St. John vi. 37.⁵ St. Matt. xxvi. 64.

I am the Light of the world,¹ I am the Vine,² I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,³ and No man cometh unto the Father but by Me; He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father?

How could He say that He would give His flesh for the life of the world? ⁴

How could He call Himself the Bread of Life? ⁵ How could He say, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away;* ⁶ or, *I am the Resurrection and the Life?*

Such language surely, my brethren, would be intolerable in a mere man, in the best of men, in the greatest of saints, in any one who is not immeasurably more than man. Then why is it that they are not intolerable in Jesus Christ? Nay, why is it that you and I cling to such words as these as verily our stay in life, and our support—so we trust—in the hour of death? Why is it?

Surely it is because they are the words of

¹ St. John viii. 12.

² St. John xv. 5.

³ St. John xiv. 6.

⁴ St. John vi. 51.

⁵ St. John vi. 35.

⁶ St. Matt. xxiv. 35.

no mere man though the greatest of men, of no mere prophet though the greatest of prophets, of no mere saint though the greatest of the saints—the King of martyrs.

But because they are all the words of One who, as well as being man, was also more than man. Who from all eternity was with the Father—one in essence, one in power with Him. The Almighty, Everlasting Son of God, who came down from heaven and took our nature in the womb of the Virgin Mother, and gave us an assurance that it was He Himself when He rose again from the dead. *He was declared to be the Son of God with power, says the great Apostle, by the resurrection from the dead.¹ I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.²*

Let us, then, once more renew our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is God and man, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.³ The Gospels

¹ Rom. i. 4.

² Rev. i. 18.

³ Rom. iv. 25.

would mislead if He did not rise from the dead, for they tell us of One who said things about Himself which could not rightly be said unless the Speaker was indeed the Lord of life and of death. It is because He rose from the dead that we can trust Him in time, and trust Him to all eternity. For if He who died is the eternal God clad in our human nature, then nothing that Scripture tells us about the power of that precious death or of the efficacy of His redeeming Blood can be exaggerated. As the years pass, and the Easter Festival comes and goes, am I getting to know more of Him and the power of His Resurrection ?

Ah, reflect thoughtfully again and again what a flood of light that blessed truth sheds over our poor human lives, giving them a beauty and a radiance that nothing, save sin, can take away. Human life is transformed by it ; we see it in its true proportions, as the prelude to the life beyond. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But if (as we Christians believe) it is but the preface to the Resurrection-life beyond, then


this life—poor in itself, insignificant enough in itself—becomes nevertheless of unspeakably momentous importance as being to each of us the sphere in which we work out our salvation.

Let us see to it that the Resurrection has its counterpart in our own lives. Our life is a Resurrection-life, because the Christian must be dying to what is bad and wrong, and living to what is right and good. Is there any known wrong habit which I ought to put away this Easter, if I am hoping to have my portion in the Resurrection of the just?

Am I living for time or for eternity, for the seen or the unseen, for self or for God?

Whether we can give the answer we should, in our better moments, all like to give to this sort of question will depend very largely as to whether the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is or is not a fact of supreme importance to us as it was to His blessed Apostles, who could write those words

which we have been considering, words which, apparently so stern, are nevertheless so truly charitable, because they are so profoundly true :
If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.



THE END

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The Empty Tomb

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